# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 55 NOVEMBER 13th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

There is only one way in which a religious renewal of the life of mankind can come about. It is that we freely expose our minds to what is happening in the world, our country and ourselves and discover God speaking to us in and through these events; and at the same time open our minds daily with childlike simplicity and expectancy to the truth of the Christian revelation. The dominant fact in the experience of large sections of our people in recent weeks has been the effects of the bombing of London and other large cities. Here is an account from two of our members of a " shelter crawl " which they undertook recently in London.

" We went to an Underground station by car and there our adventures began. We had to walk down the stairs, of course, as none of the lifts were running. It was not a case of walking, but of picking one's way over literally dozens of sprawling bodies. The passages and platforms were even more densely packed and in stations that had moving staircases the inclined slope between the escalators also provided precarious rest. A white line two feet from the edge of the platform reserved a space for genuine travellers, but every other available inch was taken up by people and bundles. Three deep on every platform, there appeared to be very little hope of any of them sleeping. Some were reading papers, others playing cards, most were eating and some enterprising women were curling their hair. A great number were simply just sitting, looking weary, resigned and good tempered. In the course of the evening we travelled by tube west and then north and back again covering a great extent of ground. Nowhere in all that journeying did we see any one spare inch of platform nor did we see any sign of disturbance or quarrelling. One policeman was in charge of each platform but there seemed nothing for him to do. The queues for water provided on every station were orderly, the white line was respected and the recumbent forms over whom the travellers stepped uttered no complaints."

The writers go on to give an account of another evening with mobile canteens for feeding people in shelters with tea and buns.

" The people were grand—no grumbles, gratitude, readiness to help in spite of their extreme discomfort. Some had been there for hours keeping places, some had had no gas and even an erratic water supply for weeks. All had dry throats. Occupations of all sorts had been devised—sewing parties, card games, sing-songs.

" The wardens came round with us and were superb. Their one concern was the ' residents ' under their care with whom they joked all the time. They helped us to wash up, to sell buns and to load up in spite of bombs and shrapnel.

" Lads of 16 who had to be at work next day at nine act as messenger boys and accompanied us on the roads to help us to pick our way. They too were fearless and full of eagerness. 'Come to our shelter to-night, Miss; I promised I'd try to get you and they'll be ever so disappointed if you don't come.' They and the wardens collected the pennies for the cups of tea and everyone was so honest that we never lost anything and made a profit on our cups of tea."

Instead of making any comment of my own on this picture, I give an extract from a letter from another of our members who has had contact day and night with these experiences in East London: " The hope of the Christian News-Letter of our emerging from the present chaos into ' an order of society that might be called Christian ' seems to be based on the assumption that the common people—the stuff of the new order—consciously or unconsciously accept Christian standards. This in turn is derived from an interpretation of their ' courage, steadfastness, devotion to duty and kindness to one another ' as Christian virtues. Our experience of people under bombardment in East London is that their virtues are those shown by the common people to each other at all times and in all countries—a solidarity brought about by long years of unhallowed suffering under peace-time capitalism, and that their mood now is one of numbed endurance without understanding and without exultation and is more likely to lead to a despairing acceptance of Fascism than to triumphant emergence into freedom. The people here, whether boys in the army or old women in shelters, are victims not crusaders."

## NEWS FROM THE CONTINENT

Many pastors of the Churches in Holland have courageously protested against the anti-Jewish laws which have been introduced into Holland. Before the services began on a recent Sunday they made an appeal to their congregations to be loyal to the principles of spiritual freedom which spring from the Christian faith and are taught in the Bible.

The immense increase in the number of prisoners in Germany in recent months has called forth increased activity on the part of the Church on their behalf. The *Evangelische Hilfswerke* is attempting to provide for the spiritual needs of French and English prisoners. In many camps there are chaplains, and where this is not the case pastors from the neighbourhood conduct services. There is a great demand for Bibles and New Testaments. The American Bible Society has provided 20,000 Gospels in French.

International agencies working for refugees are continuing to assist the emigration of non-aryans from Germany, but a grave problem exists in regard to the refugees who are still in France and who find themselves in a desperate situation. Many are starving and live in constant terror of being sent back. Efforts are being made to keep them going and to get them out of the country, but are seriously hampered by lack of funds. An appeal for aid has been made to the United States.

Reference was made in an earlier News-Letter (C.N.-L. No. 36) to the important missionary work of the Dutch and German Churches in the Dutch East Indies, where the Protestant Christian community numbers approximately one and a half million. Though money cannot be transmitted in present circumstances, missionary interest in the Dutch Churches is being kept alive. A vigorous effort is being made to maintain contributions so that funds will be available for the work of the missions as soon as contact is re-established. A good deal of money has been collected locally in the Dutch East Indies and substantial help has been received from America.

The position of the French Protestant missions is even more difficult, since the headquarters of the Paris Missionary Society is cut off not only from the mission field but from part of France. The Swiss Churches, which have long had an interest in the Paris Mission, are giving valiant help and aid is also being provided by the auxiliary committee of the Society in London. Some of the most important work of the Paris Society is in British territory.

## THE NATION'S YOUTH

The recent Youth Survey in Manchester, in the course of which the work of 862 organizations seeking to serve youth was investigated, brings out the startling fact that over 70 per cent., or nearly three-quarters, of the youth of Manchester between the ages

of 14 and 25 are untouched by church, party, voluntary organization, club or night school. Could any statement bring home more pointedly the neglect by the nation of its youth?

Those of you who are interested in the County Badge plan may be glad to know, if you have not already seen it, that *The Times* of November 5th contains both a contributed and a leading article on the subject. It is there reported that in traditional British fashion voluntary effort is going ahead without waiting for official action and that a County Badge Association is being established. I will give further particulars when they are available.

## THE USE OF THE IMAGINATION

I had a stimulating conversation recently with one of our members who in the course of our talk gave two instances in which an opportunity seemed to her to have been lost through lack of imagination. She did not question the rightness of the action taken, but held that it would have made a great difference if it had been placed in the proper setting.

The first matter was the internment of aliens. Assuming that it was necessary in the circumstances to order the internment, the Government might have said something like this: " Our country is menaced by a ruthless enemy, who in other countries has sought to weaken the defence by agents working from within. To guard against this danger we have decided that we must intern aliens of enemy nationality. We know that very many of you who are affected by this order are loyal and friendly to this country, but there is not time to separate our friends from those who are a source of danger. We are confident you will understand the necessity, and realize that it casts no slur on the good faith of many who must for the present be interned. Hardship and suffering will be inflicted on those who are innocent, but this cannot be avoided where action has to be taken quickly on a large scale. We shall do our best to reduce that hardship to a minimum and intend to examine as quickly as possible individual cases and to set at liberty, when circumstances permit, those whose loyalty and good faith is fully established." A declaration of this kind would have saved an immense amount of mental suffering, and set the policy of the Government in a wholly different light in the eyes of our own people and of the world.

The other instance is the discontinuance of the ringing of Church bells. Here was an opportunity which the Church might have turned to greater account, if it had used every agency at its disposal to proclaim to the people: " For hundreds of years the Church bells have called the people through the land every Sunday to the house of God for prayer. In this hour of national danger the safety of the people requires that the bells be used to protect that safety. But this is no time for slackening but far more for reviving the ancient custom of our land. We urge upon you, therefore, that when the bells no longer call you, you stir up yourselves, your families and your neighbours to gather together in the house of God to join in prayer for His mercy, forgiveness, protection and renewal."

I am not discussing here the merits of either question but merely passing on what was said to me as an illustration of the part which imagination may play in public affairs, great and small.

## THE DUBLIN REVIEW

The appearance of the October number of the *Dublin Review* (Burns, Oates and Washbourne. 3s. 6d. ; yearly 15s.) is an occasion, which I missed in July, to call attention to the fact that the editorship of the oldest English Roman Catholic periodical, founded more than a hundred years ago, has been taken over by Mr. Christopher Dawson. He believes that the need for an organ not tied to a party or confined to specialist studies

is greater than ever. We are fighting not merely against external enemies but against powerful forces that threaten the very existence of Western civilization. It is menaced by forces of destruction which have been held in check by a thousand years of Christian culture. It is therefore the duty of those elements in Western society that still possess a principle of spiritual unity to rally the divided forces of our civilization. Roman Catholics possess a special responsibility, since they belong to a supranational spiritual society, more organically united than any political body and possessing an independent body of principles and doctrines on which to base their judgments. But the Christian cause is also the common cause of all who are defending our civilization against the blind assault of mass despotism and the new paganism which is destructive of all moral and intellectual values. It is therefore vital that all the positive intellectual and spiritual forces of Western culture should come together in defence of their common values and traditions against their common enemies. They must unite in an effort to awaken public opinion to the issues that are at stake, and to develop the consciousness of Western culture and the spirit of loyalty to Western tradition. To this great task it is the purpose of the *Dublin Review* to contribute.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

Lord Eustace Percy, a former President of the Board of Education and now Vice-Chancellor of Durham University, has allowed me to use as a supplement his recent Matriculation Day address. Seldom have I known so much that is vital said in such little space. " But for the grace of God, there goes England ! . . . If, at this hour, we dare at all to be confident, this is the ground of our confidence."

## POSTS ARE LATE

Posts are still very erratic. You can understand the dismay with which the Subscription Department viewed the more than 500 letters which the mail bag disgorged one morning recently. A lot of these letters were dated two weeks earlier. I am not suggesting that you should imitate the writer mentioned in the House of Commons the other day who found it quicker to post his letters to the Isle of Man by air mail via South America rather than direct by inland surface mail! But postal delay is inevitable in wartime.

## BOUND VOLUMES

We are binding Nos. 27-52 of the News-Letter in green cloth with the title in gold—to match Volume I. We hope that Volume II will be ready in time to allow those of you who want to do so to send it as a Christmas gift. The price will be 8s. 6d. and the volume will include a complete index and title page. The index will be obtainable separately for insertion in folders of back numbers (price 1s.). We are also able to bind members' back numbers in a dark green board with black lettering. Many had the first twenty-six issues bound in this way and may wish to continue. The price for binding and supplying the index is 2s. 6d.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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# MATRICULATION DAY ADDRESS

## KING'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM, OCT. 14, 1940

### BY LORD EUSTACE PERCY

If I venture to speak in this place, it is not that I may speak to the College, but that I may try to speak in its name.

War has set us of the University many problems of action, but it has set us also a problem of thought. And thought is, after all, our business.

This nation has been told that it is defending Christian civilization. We accept that, but we cannot accept it lightly. If there be a Christian civilization, we are its chief guardians. It is our high privilege, the privilege of both students and teachers, not to buy and sell knowledge, but to make men. If we believe that the manners which make men are essentially Christian manners, that belief must determine our conception of University life and learning.

Frankly, we of the twentieth century have not believed that. The codes and conventions which we call civilized are, indeed, derived from Christianity; but we thought they had outgrown their origins. And better so; they were thus safer from distortion by popes or presbyteries. They had become (so we assured ourselves) the settled capital fund of European society, won and invested, secure against depreciation. The chief assets of that fund were democracy and science; therefore even the last war hardly shook our confidence in it. We had rid ourselves of Kaiserism and Tsarism; we had extended the practice of parliamentary government; we had established a League of free Nations. Science was better endowed than ever before; more highly organized and more generally applied. Our fund had not shrunk; it had grown. Its latest investments might be a little shaky, but that would pass; youth would replace their shell-shocked elders and would make the world really safe for a scientifically enlightened democracy.

This being our creed, we were ready enough to patronize religion as a healthy moral influence, but its traditional language jarred on our ears. Forgiveness of sins?—why, yes; in the old phrase, it was God's business to forgive. "Through the weakness of our moral nature we can do no good thing without thee"?—surely that was too abject a confession for the scientist and the social reformer. "Take not thy Holy Spirit from us"?—there could be no danger of that. In our private lives we might remain acutely sensitive to the truth of such language, but in our social affairs it had become almost

meaningless. There, we had but the one fragmentary text: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord . . . but he that doeth my Father's will." The only public religion worth our recognition was a religion of social works.

Well, young and old, we were wrong. We had not securely invested our spiritual capital; we have been living on it. The old language has come terribly alive. We are back in the old world of tyrants and captivities, of idolatry and martyrdom. It is a world, not only of physical, but also of spiritual insecurity. We have seen generous impulses transmuted into wickedness; a Gestapo staffed by young men who in the beginning had been nobly intent on national regeneration, on a new equality and a new fellowship. After all, it seems, the forgotten sequel to our favourite text is true; "Many will say to me, Lord, Lord . . . in thy name we have done mighty works, and I will profess to them, I never knew you . . . ye that work iniquity." A covenanted people may forsake the worship of God; forsaking that, may lose the knowledge of God's will; and, losing that, may wake to find itself bound to the worship of devils. It is possible for whole societies to fall from grace, leaving us to wonder how they can be renewed again to repentance. The salt can lose its savour. And there, but for the grace of God, goes England.

But for the grace of God. That is the other side of our experience in these last months. It is too intimate for much speech, but we have seen these words, too, come alive in the face and voice of men who have gone out from us into the storm. Somehow, not by any care of ours, there still rests upon this people a blessing not to be accounted for by forms of government, or inherited decencies or the enlightenment of science. If, at this hour, we dare at all to be confident, this is the ground of our confidence.

And it is in this confidence that we come here, not to conduct some pompous institutional ceremony, but, as an act of family worship, to ask that this same blessing may rest also upon our University labours. That is the King's prayer in opening Parliament; but we here have a special need to offer it. For it is not in great assemblies that the sacrifice is prepared and the fire from heaven kindled, but where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, and welcome, in that name, those who come to be joined to their fellowship.

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